

Title: Same sword; two edges, pt.1
Text: Isaiah 63.1-6
Theme: God's faithful response to unfaithful people
Series: Isaiah #53
Prop Stmtnt Christ is a terrifying Warrior and an even more glorious Redeemer.

Read Text: Isaiah 63.1-6; Revelation 19.11-13

The children's story, "Bridge Over Tarabithia", was made into a movie several years ago. When I saw it, I was impressed with how compelling and convincing the writer was in attempting to destroy the gospel. The story is set up with a family out in a rural setting trying to make ends meet. They are a conservative, plainly dressed family with 5 children. The two older girls, it seems, fight each other and their mom all the time. The 4th child (a girl) gets all of the affection from the dad. The baby gets all of the affection from the mom, and the middle child, a 10-11 year old boy is basically left to himself. He is ridiculed mercilessly at school, on the bus, at the playground and basically ignored at home. He has a flair for drawing, which means he has an imagination.

A new girl comes to school. She dresses in a free spirit sort of way and is immediately the brunt of ridicule. She is a neighbor to the boy, and they eventually form a friendship that centers upon their crossing a river and exploring the woods that with their imagination turns into the kingdom of Tarabithia. Fighting their enemies in Tarabithia helps them face their enemies at school, and for the boy at home. But, in order to do that, they have to free their minds to be able to imagine. Their newfound courage helps them stand up to the bullies, and you want to see them vindicated, because life, especially for the boy is particularly difficult at school and home. His dad cuts him no slack at all, and the dad is presented in a way that it is easy to dislike him.

One day, the girl asks the boy if she could go to church with him. Her family never goes, his family always does. He tells her that she wouldn't like it, besides she would have to wear a dress. She laughs and assures him that she does own dresses. She ends up going, and the scene in church is brief as they sing, the old rugged cross. On the way home, in the back of a pick-up truck, the 4th girl spills the family secrets. "If you don't believe everything the way they do, God will damn you to hell forever!" The neighbor girl looks at her friend and asks him – do you really believe that? He says, "I guess so." And then she says, "You believe in God because you have to, and you don't even like it." "I believe in God, and I don't have to, but I like it, but I don't believe that God goes around damning people to hell, he is too busy having fun to do that."

Bam! Right there, the audience is forced to make a decision. Whose side are you on? Are you on the side where God goes around sending people to hell if you don't believe

the Bible like these narrow-minded, always fighting, depressing, bitter, mean-spirited parents do, or are you not attracted to the free-spirit, life is a blast, where the dad dances with his daughter as they paint the living room with a fresh color in order for the sun to dance like fire on its walls, where life is full of possibilities instead of problems, where God is just having fun? Which one would you choose? It's skillfully presented as a no-brainer. When the neighbor girl dies in a tragic accident, the little boy is tormented by the fact that she could be in hell. His father has a change of heart, and assures his son, that God would never send a little girl like that to hell.

The reason a movie like that can have such an impact upon our beliefs is because 1) the story is framed and presented in very emotional terms. Our feelings are managed in such a way, that it is very easy to form a belief based on how our feelings are manipulated rather than on true logic and reason. 2) The audience is given a false either/or. The people who believe in a God who judges sin are embittered, depressing, spiteful and hateful, while the people who do not are loving, free and relaxed. The problem is obvious, right? Belief in a God who judges sin creates nasty people. But hold the phone. I am fully aware that there are people who use one aspect of the character of God as an excuse for their own selfishness. For someone to use the fact that God is a righteous judge as an excuse for being harsh and nasty is wrong! The fact is, God is righteous and just, but he is more. On the other hand, we can react to people and movements like that and speak only of God's kindness. In that case we use the kindness of God as an excuse to tolerate or condone sin, which is just as wrong. I fully realize that the righteous wrath of God is not a popular subject, and, is a tempting one for me or any pastor to ignore or at least minimize. We want more people to be attracted to church, not less. We do not want to run people off. So, the righteous wrath of God is a subject that is generally ignored in churches. There may still be formal language about it in official doctrinal statements, but unless these matters are actually taught, the average person in the church will learn over time, not to believe something like that because it is never mentioned and they assume therefore that it does not matter and are surprised to find out that truths like this are actually embraced; like the moviegoer who hears the 4-year old blurt out embarrassing statements like, "If you don't believe everything the way we do, God will damn you to hell forever!"

The reason why we the church is ill equipped to respond to this is because the church has taken its cues from our world. We do not want to make people uncomfortable, and the result is that we have ignored needful truths and we have a generation of people who think they are Christians and do not really know who Jesus is. We like the Jesus who is tender, approachable, lying in a manger. He is that. But He is more. We like the Jesus who weeps over our needs, who heals lepers with a touch, who eats with sinners and shames the Pharisees. We like the Jesus who raises Lazarus from the dead and feeds thousands with just a bit of bread and fish. He is that, but more. This text helps us understand the bigger picture. And in so doing it addresses this tension that we have about how we are to view God because it helps us see how God views us. It is both honest and hopeful.

The 66 chapters of Isaiah are dealing with the issue of how a faithful God is going to respond to and care for his unfaithful people. Our hearts sang as we studied the end of chapter 52 and all of chapter 53 because we were able to see that God does not love his people based on their faithfulness, or accomplishments, but because there is coming a Savior who will be faithful in their place and will live in their place and will suffer in their place and will die in their place and pay the penalty for sin in their place. We can be rescued from our sin, because Christ came. But, not every one will trust Christ. Not everyone will confess their sin and cry out to God for grace and pardon. In fact, most will attempt to live on their own and are offended by a Sovereign God. God, as Creator has made this world and has made us as an expression of his own image. Because God is righteous, Creator and sovereign, there are moral laws that cannot be violated without consequences. God is so kind to tell us what those are. God does not give us laws to kill our joy, but to protect our joy. God doesn't want you playing in the street so you don't get run over by a bus! But we are a mess! We tell God to get lost and to stick his laws in his ear because we are going to play in the street anyway, and when we get hit by a bus we blame God for the bus! What kind of God is this that would let me get hit by a bus? Isn't God strong enough to stop a bus? Why would God let someone make busses anyway?

What do you do with people who are unfaithful? The answer is: He rescues those who repent and he judges those who reject him. To the humble he is gracious. To the proud he is righteous. This is one of the major themes of the Bible. But there is more. The righteous wrath of God that is poured out on the proud is intended to make them humble. God does not delight in his wrath. God delights in his mercy. God loves to save, even through judgment; after all, the only way he could rescue us was by judging his Son in our place. But, to those who are emboldened in their arrogance, and are steadfast in their refusal to believe in God as he has revealed himself, there is judgment. It is good for us to consider the righteousness of God. It enables us to see how incredible his grace really is.

1. **Is this the Jesus you know and trust?** (63.1-6)

These verses capture a conversation of a watchman who is on the wall of Jerusalem and who sees a mighty warrior coming from Edom (modern day Jordan). This Warrior walks alone. He walks boldly, unafraid of any who would attempt to confront him. His steps are deliberate. This is a mighty warrior. He is also a seasoned warrior. His uniform is covered in red. Edom (which means red – Esau) is a land known for wineries. This guy looks like the red juice of grapes has been splattered on him. It is evident that he has been in violent combat. His approach, appearance and demeanor are very impressive. The watchman asks for him to identify himself. He does (1c). “It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.” Do you remember what Isaiah said back in 43.9 about the idols? They cannot speak. God speaks! God speaks and causes reality. God speaks and it is. God's word is true authority. To reject God's word is to reject reality. God speaks righteousness. This warrior is the one who speaks in righteousness and is mighty to save. This is very

important to keep in mind. God is not driven by a bitter vengeance, but by salvation. Those who seek to destroy those whom he saves, he will judge, and it won't be pretty.

Now, I am convinced that Isaiah is speaking of Christ because not only because Christ alone can speak in absolute righteousness and is mighty to save, but also because Revelation 19.11-16 describes Christ in almost the same way. In both of these passages, Christ is pictured as being splattered with blood. So, if he has come to save, then why is he covered in blood? The watchman asks him about it and he responds. His answer goes from v.3 through v.6. These are difficult words to hear because they are difficult truths to consider. These are the words of the Warrior – Christ. He is Savior, he is King, he is Priest, He is Prophet, he is Word, and he is Warrior. What he says about himself, while weighty to consider, provides us with a greater understanding of what is involved in our rescue. There are three things that they speak to. As we study this text, ask yourself if this is the Jesus that you know.

A. Did you know that your rescue came at great cost?

In these verses (3, 6) we read of the winepress. This is the imagery. Christ is saying that he is going to trample on his enemies, like people crush grapes. The stains and splatters on his clothing is their blood. This is violent. But, before this offends your refined senses think of this. Imagine that you are a Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz. The rest of your family and most of your neighbors and friends have been gassed to death. A couple of hours ago, the guards fled from their posts, and now, out of the woods comes a soldier. He's a GI. He is bloody, dirty, and scruffy. He has been through hell in order to rescue these Jews. Look at you. You haven't bathed in months. You are a walking skeleton. You were scheduled to die that day. Does he repulse you? Does he offend you? Are you put off by his appearance? NO! He is the most beautiful person you have ever seen. But, wait a minute! Where did that blood and dirt come from? In order to get to your prison, he had to fight against the Nazi's who were seeking to keep you imprisoned and seeking to destroy you. This soldier killed them, because they were trying to kill you.

What I am about to say is offensive to our world. I know that. But, if I do not say it, then over time, we as a church will no longer believe it. If we do not believe it, because it was not taught, then your church would have betrayed you. Here it is. Our world lives with the idea that every person is basically good. We are shocked when people do bad things, we presume that they really did not mean to, that it was someone else's fault – really, that deep, down inside, this person is really nice, etc. Because we assume that everyone is basically good, we assume that everyone who dies is going to a better place and is now looking down on us with great affection and is able to speak to us and comfort us in our times of loneliness. Listen to what is said at funerals. Making people feel good at the moment comes at the expense of truth. The truth is, there are many, many, many sinful people in this world. Either you become a follower of Christ, on his terms and surrender to this captain of your soul who loves his own so deeply, or you are an enemy of Christ,

an enemy of God who will face his wrath unprotected and unprepared. This Jesus is the Lamb who was slain for those who will trust him, but for those who reject him, he is Lion of the tribe of Judah, the King from the line of David, and the Mighty Warrior who will crush his enemies beneath his feet. Is this the Jesus you know? This is the Jesus of the Bible.

B. Did you know that Jesus is intensely angered by sin?

In verses 3 and 6, Jesus says that he “trampled them (peoples) in my wrath.” This is not the picture of a maniac who has become unhinged and went on a rampage. This is the measured, deliberate expression of righteous violence by the King of the earth who is responding to those who are in rebellion against him. Our King does not render judgment like a dispassionate judge who coldly reads the law, hands down the sentence, dismisses the court so he can run out the back door and play golf. Our King has a personal interest in what is at stake. His children have been abused and violated. He is angered by that. We see this when Christ is in the Temple and he reacts to those who are taking advantage of their position of authority and are abusing the people they are supposed to be caring for. What do you think of a person who claims to love someone, but who refuses to defend that one when he or she is being abused?

Some of you know the double pain that comes from being abused by a family member only to have another family member do nothing to stop it. Listen, if someone abuses you, you have a King who knows. You have Savior who cares. You have a mighty Warrior who will respond. Look at Christ. Do you see what he has done? Look at his uniform. Do you know what that blood means? Those who abuse you will never do it again? He is not the ego maniac ruler who is threatened by someone who wants to usurp his throne and responds with a scorched earth temper tantrum. He is the God who saves, who keeps, who loves his bride and cares for his own, and those who want to dethrone him, want to remove his presence so they can abuse his bride, will not get away with that.

Revelation 6.12-17

How intense must the wrath of the Lamb be, that people cry out to mountains and rocks to crush them, believing that being crushed is preferable to facing his wrath? Is this the Jesus you know? This is the Jesus of the Bible.

C. Did you know that only Jesus can judge and save?

Verses 3 and 5 point out that the Warrior does this alone. But look at verse 4. Look at it carefully. Notice that Christ brings both vengeance and redemption. The vengeance that he gets is a holy, righteous, and perfect vengeance. It is a vengeance that is in his heart. Which helps us understand why we are never called to get revenge. We cannot handle vengeance. Vengeance destroys us. Vengeance is like drinking rat poison and hoping that it will kill your enemy. It always destroys you because vengeance is not yours. When you try to take matters into your own hands, you are attempting to take over God's job. He

will not share his glory with you. He will not bless his competition. He will not let you do that because you cannot handle it. You see even though we are sinned against, ultimately sin is against him. Besides, sin is too serious for you to handle on your own. It will always take you down. But, we are tempted to take matters into our own hands because we are afraid that God will forget about it and let the person off the hook. Sin is so serious that only Christ can respond with a judgment that matches the crime.

But, the same Warrior who judges is also the One who redeems. Did you notice in v.4 that he calls it “the day of vengeance” and “my year of redemption”? If his vengeance and judgment is this intense and is described as a day, then how incredible must his redemption be, if he calls it, in comparison, a year?

Beloved, there are a couple of things that I want to you to marinate your heart in, this week. 1) Consider what you are saved from. It is easy to think of the gospel as a religious formula that saves you from the consequences of sin. It is deeper than that. Are we saved from sin? It is deeper than that. Are we saved from hell? It is deeper than that. The heart of the gospel is understanding that we are saved by God, from God. Our Redeemer saves us from our Judge. When you see this Warrior whose robe is drenched in blood because he has righteously carried out justice on his enemies, how can you escape? Our only hope of escape is NOT found in ourselves. It is found in the Warrior. The Warrior who judges is also the Redeemer who saves. And how did the Redeemer save? Christ came to this earth in order to die in your place. He died as the payment, as the sacrifice that appeased the wrath of God, as the one who received the righteous judgment of God against your sin, on himself. His blood was spattered so that yours would not have to be shed. His death was violent. His death was startling, repulsive, gruesome and complete. That is why he hesitated in the garden before he drank the cup of God's wrath. He knew the intensity of the wrath of God that he was placing himself under. But, he also knew that there was no other way for you to survive. You see, your sin is so serious, that either you pay with your blood, or you get covered with his. 2) Consider what you are saved to. If his vengeance is this terrifying, and it is a day, then how glorious is his redemption, if in comparison it is a year?

We will never know the glories of our salvation until we are willing to look into the depths of our judgment that Christ took in our place.

Points to ponder:

1. Do you trust Christ?
2. Are you willing to let go of “your right” to revenge?
3. Will you ask God to give you a greater sensitivity to how serious your sin is, and a greater affection for how glorious your salvation is?
4. Will you pray that God will help you see that there is no salvation apart from Christ? We must share this.